

To change the South, various supporters of this radicals' Reconstruction had to confront the white supremacist narrative of Reconstruction head-on, and they had to replace it with something more convincing, a story of Reconstruction centered on alliances between white and black working people. To construct this new story, activists drew together elements of the counter-memory of Reconstruction maintained by African Americans and analyzed that counter-memory in terms of class. This new historical memory of Reconstruction became a tool in the work of dismantling Jim Crow. The radicals' Reconstruction made significant progress, especially in the years bracketing the end of World War II, and for a brief moment southerners could see the convergence of the world they were creating and the stories they were telling about Reconstruction. Progress in challenging Jim Crow legitimated the radicals' Reconstruction in much the same way that the increase of segregation had earlier validated a white supremacist narrative of Reconstruction. But with the sudden upsurge of anticommunism across America, and especially in the South, where anticommunism became an effective mode of fighting against the civil rights movement, the radicals' Reconstruction flickered out, along with the dream of the South it had tried to create.

The white supremacist narrative of Reconstruction rejected outright the two principles of Reconstruction that had been truly radical at the time and remained so in the twentieth century. The first was the rejection of racial and gender hierarchy as an ordering principle for society. The second was that property rights were not absolute and must be subservient to social welfare. Obviously, few supporters of Reconstruction, even the most ardent Radical Republicans, believed wholeheartedly in both these propositions and were willing to act upon them. As historians Heather Cox Richardson and Steven Hahn have both argued, it was not the northern, white architects of Reconstruction policy in the Radical wing of the Republican Party who carried these ideas to their furthest extension; the Radical Republicans were strong supporters of capitalism and private property. Rather, it was rural black workers in the South and their few white allies who combined the two ideas into a powerful and potentially transformative ideology. But whether they were fully accomplished at the time or not, the ideas were being debated and, in attenuated form perhaps, provided the basis for much of the reform of the late 1860s and early 1870s in the South. Conservative southerners took these ideas seriously, even if they were not fully implemented, and their opposition to these ideas grounded their opposition to Reconstruction as a whole.

Southern historian Woodrow Wilson noted in 1901, "Reconstruction is still revolutionary matter."<sup>4</sup>

The new narrative of Reconstruction history I describe with the phrase "radicals' Reconstruction" endorsed both these principles enthusiastically. In casting about for a historical memory of Reconstruction that celebrated, rather than denigrated, the possibility of racial equality, the creators of this radicals' Reconstruction were able to draw on the work of pioneering Negro historians who had been building their histories of Reconstruction around these propositions since the 1910s and by the early 1930s were beginning to influence the mainstream white historical profession as well. Prompted by the Communist Party's attempts to organize southern workers, the radicals could also draw on the less formalized but no less powerful and persuasive body of counter-memory that circulated as oral tradition among African Americans. Always a minority position at the time, the aspects of Reconstruction that challenged *laissez-faire* capitalism were the least hardy in historical memory, and by the 1930s there were only a handful of locations where African Americans who had acquired land during the period could look to their own family histories to see a shadow of that proposition. The hopes that land reform could be carried out on a large scale were never realized, so to the extent that this aspiration of Reconstruction was remembered, it was seen not as a way of thoroughly restructuring or challenging capitalism itself, but as a way for individuals to enter the system as landowners. However, by the 1930s, the proposition that property rights were not absolute and must be subservient to social welfare had gained new adherents among the more left-wing supporters of the New Deal and across a surprisingly broad swath of the population—even in the hidebound South—who were inspired by the Great Depression to reconsider the tenets of the entire capitalist system that had created it and the history of that system.

In 1915, African American historian Carter G. Woodson and friends in Chicago drew upon the support of northern philanthropists and the Tuskegee Institute to create the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) and the *Journal of Negro History*. Woodson's enterprise drew a long-standing tradition of African American historical writing into the new structures of the historical profession, establishing Negro history as a legitimate subfield and providing support for research and publication. At a time when African American historians could find neither employment nor audience in the white academic world, the

ASNLH became an alternative professional sphere. Whereas Du Bois had attempted to enter the white historical profession and was rebuffed, Woodson gathered together a network of academics at black colleges, ministers, teachers, and black professionals who shared his interest in Negro history and created an organization parallel to the American Historical Association, a counterpublic where Negro history could emerge from its private and local contexts of origin and find a national scholarly audience.<sup>5</sup>

The ASNLH had a precarious financial existence for its first several years, so Woodson turned to the deep pockets of northern philanthropists interested in education. Once Woodson secured a grant from the Carnegie Corporation in 1921, he turned to the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial for more funding to hire a full-time researcher devoted to studying free blacks before the Civil War and the role of African Americans during Reconstruction. Woodson argued for the significance of the project, pointing out that "during the Reconstruction the Negro in his new status became the most important social and political topic before the country." Such a project fit well within the scope of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, which devoted part of its resources to remedy "the absence of scientific knowledge concerning the Negro's position in American life and various social, economic, and political forces which surround himself and of which he is a part" by working with "competent Negro investigators." The officers of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial thought projects such as Woodson's could have a therapeutic effect on race relations across the country. "It is to be observed that this Association [the ASNLH] is not in any way a propagandist one," observed the director of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial. "[It is] simply endeavoring to determine facts of interest both to whites and negroes with reference to the negroes. On the basis of his facts it is easy to see that much good may result where now there is misunderstanding from a lack of authoritative information." The ASNLH made plans "to arouse interest and to arrange for conducting throughout the country a campaign for collecting facts bearing on the Negro prior to the Civil War and during the Reconstruction period."<sup>6</sup>

The *Journal of Negro History* included some articles about Reconstruction in its earliest years, but it was in 1920 that Reconstruction became an important topic in the journal. The January 1920 issue included over fifty pages of documentation of "Some Negro Members of Reconstruction Conventions and Legislatures and of Congress." This information came from many sources, including proceedings of the conventions and legislatures themselves, newspapers, and letters from participants and observers. Following this data was a brief memoir by "John G. Thompson,

the Original Carpet-bagger." In addition to the piece on Thompson, the *Journal of Negro History* solicited from its readers additional information and corrections about its articles on Reconstruction, and prominent Reconstruction political, educational, and religious leaders contributed accounts of their experiences. Woodson introduced the documents, writing, "As future historians will seek for facts beyond those compiled by biased investigators now writing monographs in this field, a few persons realizing the importance of preserving the records in which the actual facts are set forth, are now directing the attention of the country to this neglected aspect of our history."<sup>7</sup>

A \$25,000 grant from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial enabled the ASNLH to hire A. A. Taylor, a young African American historian, in the summer of 1922 to study Reconstruction full-time. A product of the District of Columbia's first-rate educational system, Taylor had studied at the University of Michigan and had worked for the New York Urban League and the Twelfth Street Young Men's Christian Association in Washington, D.C., before joining the faculty of West Virginia Collegiate Institute. There he had met Carter G. Woodson, and soon Taylor was contributing to the *Journal of Negro History*. In 1922, his second article was a reconsideration of the careers of black congressmen during Reconstruction. When Taylor joined the ASNLH as a researcher in 1922, he was able to combine his work and graduate study, completing his M.A. at Harvard in 1923 with a thesis on Reconstruction in South Carolina. The *Journal of Negro History* published his work in two issues in 1924, and the ASNLH's publishing house issued it in book form later that year.<sup>8</sup>

Taylor's history of Reconstruction in South Carolina led the way for future historians to challenge the Dunning school. Building on ideas first presented by Du Bois, but with the institutional support of the ASNLH, Taylor was able to address his work to the community of scholars devoted to Negro history that Carter G. Woodson had slowly built up over the previous decade. In his introduction, Taylor criticized the works written by historians trained at Johns Hopkins and at Columbia, arguing that they were so biased that, "except so far as they contain unconscious evidence, [they] are practically worthless in studying and teaching the history of the reconstruction period." The existing histories of Reconstruction, he argued, focused too much on politics at the expense of all else. They also relied too heavily on an uncritical use of sources created by the contemporary opponents of Reconstruction. Taylor intended to consider a broader array of evidence, and to do so without the racist assumptions that guided the Dunning school.<sup>9</sup>

Taylor put African Americans at the center of the story. He discussed the transition to freedom and the dilemmas the Black Code posed for freedpeople. Turning the conventional narrative of confused and helpless freedmen on its head, Taylor described the freedmen as managing to get by after the war, while "the whites, accustomed to have all their affairs managed by an aristocracy which was then ruined, seemed powerless." One of Taylor's most significant contributions was his analysis of the economic aspects of Reconstruction, especially "the gradual economic development of the State out of the chaos of the transition" to free labor. This was crucial to Taylor's overall recasting of the narrative of Reconstruction, for if the accounts of South Carolina going to complete ruin as a result of freed and enfranchised African Americans were "merely political prate," as Taylor argued, then the overthrow of Reconstruction could not be justified. In addition to economic progress, Taylor highlighted the growth of educational and religious institutions for the freedpeople. In his discussion of politics, Taylor blamed white South Carolinians who "held themselves aloof from the Negroes" for preventing what could have been a more cooperative and less adversarial relationship from forming. The Reconstruction government received credit for its accomplishments, but Taylor acknowledged that corruption was a serious problem; many of the best African American reformers worked against the corruption, however, something earlier historians had failed to note. Taylor justified the rates of taxation during Reconstruction as necessary to support the expanded social functions of a modern government, and he used extensive tables of data to compare South Carolina against other states at that time to show that its situation was not as extraordinary as usually portrayed. When it came to "The Overthrow of the Reconstructionists," Taylor described the 1876 campaign bluntly as a "coup d'état." Taylor understood that the Dunning school had its roots in contemporary partisan depictions of Reconstruction, so he devoted a chapter to showing how the Democratic government used a politically charged investigation of corruption to provide ex post facto justification for their illegal seizure of power.<sup>10</sup>

Taylor's study drew mixed responses. The most favorable came from Walter F. White of the NAACP. Writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, he praised the book for its careful and unbiased scholarship. Although White admitted that the book would "probably be completely ignored by the white South and North," he hoped it might counter "the stories . . . so familiar to the followers of the Rev. Thomas Dixon and D. W. Griffith." White blamed Dunning-school histories of Reconstruction for the rise of intolerance in America, suggesting that "the whole country has in turn

been influenced by the intolerance of the Southern states." Within the historical profession, Taylor's work received limited attention. In a review for the *American Historical Review*, Carl Russell Fish favored the idea of studying Reconstruction from the point of view of African Americans, but criticized Taylor for being too critical of earlier histories of Reconstruction. White southern historians were less charitable. From the University of South Carolina, Yates Snowden later summarized writing on Reconstruction in South Carolina, adding to his correspondent, "I have not mentioned H. A. Taylor's [*sic*] book on 'The Negro in S.C. during Rec.,' published by the A.S.N.L.H. for it is hardly worth considering."<sup>11</sup>

The first challenge to the Dunning school from white scholars came from two young historians from the Carolinas, Francis B. Simkins and Robert H. Woody. Simkins was born into an old Edgefield family in 1897, graduating from the University of South Carolina just in time to serve in World War I. He completed his M.A. and Ph.D. in history at Columbia University. In 1926 he began teaching at Emory University, and it was here that he met a promising undergraduate, Robert H. Woody. Born in western North Carolina and raised in Kentucky, Woody had arrived at Emory in 1923. Woody was in one of Simkins's classes, and in 1926 Simkins asked Woody to join him in writing a history of Reconstruction in South Carolina. The two spent the summers of 1927 and 1928 researching the book, and Woody used the topic for both his master's thesis and dissertation at Duke University. Woody wrote the chapters on economic and political matters, and Simkins worked on the first years of Reconstruction. In summer 1930 they put the book together and submitted it to the University of North Carolina Press. The readers' reports, coming primarily from South Carolina academicians, were favorable, claiming that the book "contain[ed] much that is new, much that has been neglected and . . . replac[ed] erroneous conceptions along certain lines, with truth." Even the curmudgeonly Yates Snowden expressed his approval, notwithstanding the fact that "some of his [Simkins's] conclusions [about African Americans] would meet with the warm approval of [NAACP cofounder] Oswald Garrison Villard!" The book was published in March 1932 and won the American Historical Association's John H. Dunning Prize.<sup>12</sup>

*South Carolina during Reconstruction* was a different sort of history of Reconstruction in several important ways. The authors signaled their break with the traditions of the Dunning school early in the preface, saying they would "forego the temptation of following in the footsteps of historians who have interpreted the period as only a glamorous but tragic melodrama of political intrigue." Simkins and Woody's portrayal of Af-